Jurnal Komunikasi
Jilid 20, 2004
m.s: 219-242

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A Preliminary Metaphorical Gazing on Organisational Stories

Introduction

The narratives turn in human inquiry (Mitchell, 1981) or believing in 'tales' (Kreiswirth, 1992) have reached the social sciences, and the turn has created a situation of many potentialities and spaces. In this state of chora, to use Plato's Timaeus in the broadest sense, the turn produces many energy charges which are fluid in movements (Sallies, 1999). In this space of possibilities of receiving all things, this narrative's moment must not be ignored and seen as a mere fad in the discipline as it is in line with the present 'cultural' state of organisational communication. According to Carlone and Taylor (1988:340) organisational communication, nowadays shimmers and re-appears' as cultural communication as and about organisation. Thus the inclusion of narrative to the centre of the discipline should not be an issue. The intimacy of narrative and culture, often in guise of anthropology, is well quoted in many texts discussing cultural issues. Indeed, as suggested by Cooper (1995: 131), without *accounting* of stories by informants and performed communication by storytellers there could be no anthropology. Yet, organisational narratives as a form of 'cultural obviousness' in cultural 'writing' production (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992:33) is relatively new topic of research in organisational communication studies, at least in Malaysia.

Again, if one's to borrow Plato's expression, not enough choras has been given in many communication departments in this country concerning organisational stories as part of a 'version' of world-making (Scheffler, 1997:189), that is in understanding organisational communication. The trend of discussing

organisational stories in the corridors of the discipline tends to continue. This action remaining in the baby bath perhaps backfiring as it could only mean as activity of reasserting the world system theory — the powerful centre reign over the powerless periphery. It is soothing not either to justify such exclusion as part of socio-cultural particularism of one's own territoriality under the rubric of politics of identity .To use Bennabi's this slumbering state could be related to the state of 'colonialisability' (Barium, 1992). It is rather ironic that scholars in the 'West/motherland' of the discipline are pursuing and creating chora, while people in the periphery continue to adhere to a kind of old orthodoxy or promoting hegemonic parochialism of a certain school of thoughts by taking catholic oath toward some acknowledged 'failures' of the discipline . It scares most though if this narratives marginalisation is a sign of alexithymics of the discipline arising out of merely resistance out of ignorant, to use Foucaultian's term. Indeed it is scary if marginalisation of the topic relates to the attitude or behaviour of tacitly accepting the defective and out-moded theory in explaining phenomena. Maines (1993) noted that such action is a sign of 'rottenness' of the body of a discipline. Hopefully that the rejection of this topic on narratives is more related to the intellectual will in the wake of de-westernisation of the [communication] studies.

In the light of the above paragraphs, it is not the aim of this paper to pinpointing follies of others, but to share some excitements about gazing at stories. At least, after reading this writing, those exotopist could be prejudicially (Gadamer, 1989) justified with their position of not accepting stories and narratives in organisational communication. Hopefully, this writing will be a kind of élan vital to any 'qualitative outsider' in understanding and appreciating the 'other' approach of seeing the life-world under study. Bakhtin/ Medvedev (1928/1985) noted that by being in the domain of 'outsidedness', that is standing on different grounds, one could recognised differences of the 'other worlds' of the *others*, which at the same time provide 'proof' that their differences are not merely based on romanticised empathy or archaic hostility of different paradigms in knowing and understanding communication 'puzzlement' (Fernandez, 1986) in organisations.

Basically this article is a preliminary knowing about organisational stories. Ideas related to the subject are extensive, and thus this article is just a kind of provocation for further investigations. Thus basically, this paper is more about placing the context, positioning the topic and defining or framing the concept

of stories in organisational communication, specifically with reference to its engagement with culture.

Placing the context: Culture, narratives and communication

It is best to be 'prejudicial' at this juncture as part of 'local understandings' of the whole article. This practise is not far away from what being fundamental to the practice of philosophical hermeneutics. Here, prejudices is about 'pre-understandings' before understandings. It is about making sense (Weick, 1995).

Culture and narrative are 'interlocking' (Pacanoswky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982:122) in nature, where one could not survive without another. Culture is a concept borrowed from anthropology which basically referring to the way of life, including people's behaviour, the things that they make, and their ideas (Rosman and Rubel, 1992:5-6; Schultz and Lavenda, 1995). An organisation in this light of the above view on culture is a 'cultural site' (McLeod and Wilson, 1994; Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1992:102; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992:62; Barfield, 1997:17-23). This idea is not alien to organisational communication scholars: "Cultures do not exist separately from what people communicate" (Conrad, 1994:27). Borman (1983:100) is more explicit in linking culture with communication: Culture in the communicative context means the sum total ways of living, organising, and communing built up in a group of human beings ... Important components of an organisation's culture include shared norms, reminiscences, *stories*, rites, and rituals that provide members with unique symbolic common ground.

The above views in many ways revisits Hall's (1959) suggestion, quoted by Frank and Fahrbach (1999:254), that the pattern of communication defines the culture of an organisation. Pepper (1995:36), a leading scholar on organisational communication culture, nicely summarises the idea in the following words: Through communication individual's co-ordinate their perceptions and their behaviour with others, resulting in pockets of people with a common understanding of the same event. The importance of this line is that communication creates the organisation, through the construction of cultures.

With regards to the above, "authoring and co-authoring" narratives have been cited as one of the important communicating activities in an organisation (Czarniawska, 1997:28). According to

Fisher (1985) who promotes the narrative paradigm in communication studies, people are *homo narrans*. The paradigm envisions that people "are always full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors)". This special relationship between man and narrative is best summarised by MacIntyre (1981/1990:201-209) when he implicitly said that human beings are authors and social life is a narrative. Indeed it is in this light that one must understand Bruner's (1990:35) claim about the centrality of narrative in our life. "[Narrative is] the organising principle [by which] people organise their experience in, knowledge about, and transaction with the social world" meaningfully. Narratives in this light are acting as both modes of reasoning and a mode of representation. "People can apprehend the world narratively and people can tell about the world narratively "(Richardson, 1990: 118). Here, narrative is simply being defined as a general term for an account of events or experiences, fact of fiction, long or short, detailed or plain. This assumes that all narratives are about specific past events. And this intimacy of narrative to events is recognised by almost all theorists.

To conclude, a narrative evolves around telling, relating and narrating a story, and they are acts of communication (Gennette, 1980; Gasparov, 1978). In this regard, a narrative cannot take place without a giver of narrative (sender) and a recipient of narrative (receiver). From this perspective, a narrative is a 'message' and a mode, a fundamental element in the communication process. A point to note, narrative communication is not merely sending or transmitting but also about consuming narratives. It is a 'hot' activity because communicators are never value-free people.

Positioning stories

Stories, noted White (1981), are a dominant narrative in an organisation. Perhaps this supremacy is intimately related to Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm where human beings are seen as *homo narrans*. Weick (1995:217) claims that individuals think narratively and make sense in narrative form, a view shared by Bruner (1987), Polkinghorne (1988) and Czarniawska (1997). Greco (1996:47) writes, "Narrative logic is concerned with capturing complex experiences that combine sense, reason, emotion, and imagination". On this point, stories shape human conduct as they embody motives, feelings, aspirations, intentions and goals. I believe this sheds a light on why members in organisations hear and tell stories most of the time (Martin, 1982; Fineman and Gabriel, 1996).

[Organisational] story is a contested term. To Mandler (1984) a story is said to be a 'story' or has 'storiness' if it has the story grammar. In this grammar, a protagonist and some type of causal sequences must be present. Brown (1990) noted that the linearity of time is often not observed in organisational stories. As such, past and present is mixed as the past is thrust into the present. The actual event is 're-done' although the presentation of order of events may change through the process of narration. It is a re-ordered view of reality. On the issue of stories relevancy, listeners/ readers have the upper hand over the storyteller even though the latter is responsible for framing it in an appropriate way. Storytellers often express themselves through words of importance, significance, and relevance in a way that a listener will appreciate. In relation to the above, organisational stories should ring true to members. In recent years the following definitions have been added to the organisational stories literature.

- A story is, not only oral but also written, performance involving two or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience (Boje, 1991)
- Stories are referenced with a nod on the head, a brief,"You know the full story," or "with a code word or two: His way!" (Boje, 1995:1000)
- Stories do not require beginnings, middles or endings (Bruner, 1990:43-59).
- Poetic license is the prerogative of storytelling as accuracy lies in the story's meaning (Gabriel, 1998:136).

Brown (1990) in this regard believes good and powerful organisational stories must have a sense of temporality, a story grammar, and relevance for members and truthfulness.

Sense of temporality.
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Story grammars.
Structurally a story has a preface, recounting sequence and closing sequence. The preface provides the orientation to the significance

of the account. In the recounting sequences, various events are presented. As the recounting ends, the teller provides some indication that the story has been completed. A good grammar leads to greater comprehension and retention among listeners. (*See* Mandler, 1984. He uses other terms, story scheme and schemata, to reflect the same idea of story grammar. They act as structures consisting of 'sets of expectations' about the way in which stories unfold, involving typical plots (including beginning, episodes and endings), characters, settings and so on. The above idea is not far from the 'grammar of motives' where the structure is composed minimally of the pentad of an Agent, an Action, a Goal, a Setting, and an Instrument — Trouble. A similar idea is seen in Bruner (1987:18):" Stories are about the vicissitudes of human intention.")

Relevance
The relevance of the story is determined by listeners/readers even though a storyteller is responsible for framing it in an appropriate way. Storytellers often express themselves through words of importance, significance, and relevance in a way that a listener will appreciate.

Ring of truth.
Organisational stories should ring true to members. As such it is very rare for listeners to ask whether the story is absolutely true or false. Members who interpret the story therefore hold the power to determine if the story rings true or not.

Framing the stories

Heuristically organisational stories could be seen in the following metaphorical frames. At this stage, metaphors are being employed for the sake of simplicity in comprehending the complexity (Ortony, 1993) of the vast literature on stories, scattering around in various discipline. Such seeking is however not coincidental though. First, the charm of metaphors' whose magic permeates many scholars today (Morgan, 1986/1997; Grant and Oswick, 1996; Oswick and Grant, 1996). According to Grant and Oswick (1996: 3), metaphors possess a generative capacity of liberating existing pre-conceptions about a particular phenomenon Such liberation in turn prevents one from falling into the trap of believing that the social system which surrounds us is inevitable, rigid and unchanging. In due course of this liberating, a metaphor is assumed to give a complete new

experience and new understanding about the already "taken-for-granted" known phenomena (Petrie and Oshlag, 1993), relaxing from the dominant presuppositions, and giving the advantage of familiarity from strangeness (Hawkes, 1972). Putnam, Phillips and Chapman (1996) meanwhile show that metaphors suggest a "mental imagery" break from the mechanistic view of organisational communication to a view of organisational communication as situationally relative and variable. Secondly, metaphors and emotions are inseparable as the former is the 'container' of the latter (Jones, 1996:114)..

a) *Stories as Fictions*

Lately, ideas on fiction and fictionality gain ground in organisational studies (Phillips, 1995). Indeed, what used to be call 'empirical' research is now seen as 'fiction', and said to be just another 'form of storytelling'.(Astley and Zammuto, 1992, explain this as follows: Empirical research is essentially a form of storytelling, albeit an esoteric variety of storytelling Like all storytellers we need stimulus materials around which to construct our stories and this is where empirical observation serves its role. We do not invent theories in vacuum; observing managerial activity is a catalyst that galvanises creative thought. Empirical observation serves as an excuse for theoretical work, but the theory so produced is essentially fiction).To some the term storytelling refers to the creation of stories. By seeing things in terms of fiction, stories present the 'availability' of a state of contradictory affairs such as inconsistencies or impossibilities. The situation is best seen in the light of storytelling as an act of selecting meaningful events and creating meaningful sequences. In a similar vein, by viewing stories as fiction, open-endedness or ambiguities are considered as merits, not to be remedied (Ronen, 1994:93). Indeed, such features provide exciting opportunities for imagination and creativity and for being critical towards the phenomena (Czarniawska-Joerges and Gullet de Monthoux, 1994).

In line with the notion of fiction, organisational stories therefore inherit fictional properties. Of interest here is *imaginativa* and *fantasia*, the dimension of creativity that makes imagination and fantasies realism. Their realities are part of the "secondary world", the world that has a considerable common ground with the "primary world" of ours (Swinfen, 1984). Mair (1988:217) writes,

> Every story speaks of a world... The world is hidden in the folds of the story and, to a degree, becomes available as the story unfolds. The self/world is difficult to read since the story speaks from it and through it and generally about it. Stories assume and speak from their worlds. The facts — kinds of facts — they allow are woven in their particular and mostly unspecified webs.

b) *Stories as Accounts*

Viewing the organisation as a cultural text, member's accounts are 'reading materials'. To Gabriel (1991b) accounts of each story are recitals. In accounts, members define and simplify their reality. March and Simon (1958) refer to this as bounded reality. It is a reality with a specified frame of reference and point of view. Accounts in this view are thus particular definitions of the situation (Taylor, 1993:8). They are considered symbolic, as they are not events themselves, but representations of them constructed by the narrators and audience through a process of communication (Jones, 1996; Gabriel, 1991c; Mahler, 1988).

According to Fulop and Rifkin (1999), accounts thrive in two forms: local or popular. Often, local accounts take the form of stories we can hear in various 'meeting places' such as in corridors, toilets or car parks. The popular accounts on the other hand are stories that attract or hold a considerable attention, and are remarkable enough to be published.

Accounts in the form of stories, noted White (1981), are a dominant narrative in an organisation. Perhaps this supremacy is intimately related to Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm where human beings are seen as *homo narrans*. Weick (1995:217) claims that individuals think narratively and make sense in narrative form, a view shared by Bruner (1987), Polkinghorne (1988) and Czarniawska (1997a). I believe this sheds a light on why members in organisations hear and tell stories most of the time (Martin, 1982; Fineman and Gabriel, 1996).

c) *Stories as Voices*

Closely related to the notion of fiction is the idea of voice (Genette, 1980, 1988; Aczel, 1998:482; Brown, 1998). As a concept, voice exists at least at two levels in organisations. First, it refers to statements or actions of organisation members. It is an enactment. Secondly, it refers to a product or a service, and it is better known as the organisation's voice. To some people, organisational voice is

closely related to what people refer to as the 'party line'. In the wake of change the party line turned to be the 'sacred' narratives of the 'powerful' management. To members, organisational voice is regarded as positive if the voice creates positive relationship with themselves or vice versa. To Grant, Keenoy and Oswick (1998:7), voices can also be seen in terms of monologues and dialogues. In the former, accounts tend to contain a coherent story of the organisation and usually represent the perspective of one actor or group of actors. In the latter, a multitude of voices exists. In that form of polyphonic situation, struggles for dialogic dominance are acknowledged. A point to note is that silence in this view is also a part of voice. Pope (1995: 197-198) makes things clearer:

> It is important to recognise that all texts — our own included — move dialectically between monologue and dialogue. ... They are subject to the variable display of centripetal (monologic) and centrifugal (dialogic) pressures...and an apparent polyphony of voices always turns out to have a dominant harmony or melody.

A point to note is that silence in this view is also a part of voice.

d) *Stories as Performances*

In simple terms, a performance is an enactment (Browning, 1991). It is about events presented in a certain fashion (Todorov, 1981:33-39). Indeed, a performance is often seen as synonymous with theatricality (Heath, 1994:6). With this understanding, I view performances as associated closely with 'dramatism', full of motives (Burke (1945: xv; Baumeister and Newman, 1994:680; Murray, 1997:12). Stories are indeed performances (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983) taken by the staff as a way out to comprehend the shift of order to disorder. From this perspective, story telling becomes an issue of choice. It is an act of selecting significant events and arranging them into a significant sequence. Selection also means a deletion of the 'irrelevant' (Alasuutari, 1995:72) with certain "logical appropriateness" (Browning, 1992:287), such as the context and historicality of the performance.

It is worth to note that a performance is also a play. Often, the term play is related to recreation, having fun, pleasure and being serious. Whatever the perception, plays are creative constructions and productions that give many possibilities for emotional relationships to grow. They provide a stage for humour, passion,

pathos, or tragedy, for example, to germinate (Fine and Martin, 1995:166). Indeed, as Van Buskirk and McGrath (1992) argue, stories shape emotionality in organisations, primarily through actors perceiving and responding to events.

Nowadays, plays have become a very serious business. Seriousness indeed provides 'opportunities' for plays to become shadowy, hostile and phoney, which is as behind-the-scene activities (Deal and Jenkins, 1994). (The notion of "dark play" comes to my attention upon reading Stronach,1999. According to this author, in that type of play there are inversions and displacements. Moreover, my impression of the dark play related to my 'experiences' in reading the state of football in Malaysia where so many players were caught doing unprofessional things. As shown in Caillois (1962) there are many behind-the-scene plays. Such plays could be displayed in many forms such as masking and trance, clowning and pranking. He notes that in India there is a term relates to play, *kredati.* In *kredati* there are capricious movements provoked by overabundance of gaiety and vitality. It is often used to describe illicit or forbidden sexual relationships, or rise and fall of waves. A point that I would like to make is that in plays there are 'turbulence, dizziness and disorder, chance, competitions.' I reckon in plays there are many secrets, motives, and concealment. Most of the time, the 'true' meanings of plays are 'hidden,' as they are full of symbolism. (At this point I remembered *Noh*, a Japanese type of drama, where human beings at certain stages appear disguised, such as in the form of a ghost). For me this is masking. According to Park (1950) as quoted by Goffman (1959: 30), it is probably no mere historical accident that the word "person," in its first meaning, is a mask).

The dynamics of creativity of playing could also slide into collusion that is largely as the result of the meshing of fantasies. To 'deprived' members, fantasy is the vehicle by which they could enjoy the pleasure of 'inflicting' pain, and set up tensions for the people in power. Such actions of symbolic order include giving nicknames, writing graffiti, private jokes, rumours, and gossips or playing dumb (Scott, 1990). In Bakhtinian term, those 'suspension' actions are part of the carnivalisque (Coulter, 1999: 9-10; Vice, 1997:183-184). In that carnivalisque, a temporary liberation from the established order is celebrated. They are intimately related to discontent and function as mechanisms of psychological survival (Gabriel, 1991:327). In other words, in fantasy, members have the abilities to liberate themselves from victimisation to empowerment,

making the unheard voice audible, and at the same time have the opportunity to enjoy them as an effective therapeutic tool (Divinyi, 1995). The above actions indeed are "offstage" behaviours, which Scott (1990) includes in his description about "hidden transcripts." At the same time they are weapons of resistance of the weak (Scott, 1985; Foreman, 1996; Ahmad and Hartley, 1999). Often through these scripts, the powerful would be hurt or being killed, which is through the 'creative imagination'. The 'cutting down' in many ways act as a release valve for pain (Gabriel, 1995).

e) *Stories as Language Activities*

I define activities as the engagement of a subject toward a certain goal, objective or motives. In this light language is brought to the centre stage, that is to be "an active world-making" tool not merely to transmit information but to perform acts as well (Culler, 1997:98 -100).(*See* Pitt,1998 for a reading on how language is utilised as personal theories of action. Here a narrative is seen as an activity whereby, among others, a metaphor is used as a strategy for action. The author calls this script approach. In a similar vein, Boden (1994) argues about the centrality of talk in organisations).

Another point closely related to the above idea is language games. Browning (1992:291) noted that stories are language games in organisations. A language game is a Wittgensteinian idea. It is similar to Bakhtin's notion of speech genre. According to Bakhtin, the wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless as human activities are inexhaustible and provide various possibilities. (*See* Hoenisch,1998). As games, he asserts that stories feed on differences as a way to thrive although at certain times they can operate to provide order. This notion, stories as games, indeed emphasises the presence of many kinds of utterances or multiplicity of voices. At the same time one must note that in a game, there are movements. It involves work of dynamics (Thatchenkery and Uphadaya, 1996: 308-330) and alignments (Harris, 1988: 97). The dynamism however is a source of conflicts that are often related to issues of influence, power, politics and control. Stories in this sort of atmosphere often take the colour of the folk tales in which there are heroes and victims, love and hatred, domination and opposition. Fineman and Gabriel (1996) in their recent works highlight such 'folkloric' situations in modern organisational life. As an illustration, the following articles on stories, among others, should be consulted: Gabriel (2000, 1997a, 1995), Helmer (1993) and Jordan (1996).

f) *Stories as Anthromorphism*

Implicitly, by taking the above metaphorical formulation, stories have the 'attributes of human form.' Indeed, I sense such anthropomorphism is in the air upon reading the title of Frye's (1990/1957), *The Anatomy of Criticism*. As such, "descriptions exhibit human activity as purposeful engagement in the world" (Polkinghorne, 1995:5). Stories in general can be seen in four 'master' configurations (Frye, 1990/1957). They are: comedy, romance, tragedy and satire. Such a division however lacks dynamism if it is taken too simply. In reality, stories are known to 'bleed over their boundaries' and interweave (Van Maanen, 1988). Stories in this view then are a kind of "form of life" (Phillips, 1995:635). Thus stories have behaviour and personality of their own although in reality they need an author to give them life. Therefore stories have, among others, moods, emotions, desires and voices (Genette, 1980; 1988; Morgan and Dennehy, 1997:494; Van Bushkirk and McGrath, 1992). More often than not such 'feelings' are cloaked in symbols and glazes of language such as metaphors (Czarniawska, 1997a). The above properties are in line with the nature of telling a story where the requirements of accuracy and veracity are relaxed in the interest of making points. To a great extent this poetic licence and flexibility are the privileges of story telling. Often such narrative creativity is intentional in order to evade censorship.

In my view the above classification or framing, if seen holistically, provides interesting points. Stories can be understood in terms of opposition: heroes and victims, happiness and sadness, compliance and resistance, winning and losing, honesty and deception, and superior and subordinates. (*See* <http: www.capcollege.bc.ca. /dept/magic/cmns/symbolism.html>). Furthermore, stories, unlike logic, are not stopped dead by contradiction as they thrive on it (Bruner, 1990:350). Take for example a description on what is plot in a narrative. "The plot of a narrative usually means the tensions which are the fuel of the story. This might often involve some kind of conflict." (*See* "Interpretation of Fiction - Keywords" at <http://www.saltdal.vgs.no/engfict.htm>).

In 'practice', Frye's types of stories are very popular, at least to those who make the effort of classifying them. A good example can be seen in Gabriel's (1997a) work. In 1991a and 1991b he presented his 'stories' in term of comic, tragic and epic. In 1995, he 'narrated' his stories in term of tragic or romantic. In 1996, he told his 'stories' in the form of tragedy — winning and losing,

survival and injuries. He shows that tragedy, comedy, and romance cover the great majority of stories in organisations. According to Gabriel, most stories in organisations revolve around the following rubrics: computer, leader or director, person trauma or emotional injury, accident, special characters in the organisation, crisis, practical jokes, cock-up, nostalgia, sex and love, sackings and redundancies and death. Skoldberg (1994) also utilised Frye`s classification in his research work on change in Sweden. In addition to tragic, romantic and comic, he also talks of satirical tales.

g) *Stories as emotions*

As a kind of "form of life" (Phillips, 1995:635), a story has, among others, moods, emotions and desires (Genette, 1980; 1988; Morgan and Dennehy, 1997:494; Van Bushkirk and McGrath, 1992). More often than not such 'feelings' are cloaked in symbols and glazes of language such as metaphors (Czarniawska, 1997). The above properties are in line with the nature of telling a story where the requirements of accuracy and veracity are relaxed in the interest of making points. To a great extent poetic licence and flexibility are the privileges of story telling.

Van Buskirk and McGrath, 1992: 9) notes,

> [The] growing literature on organisational storytelling has been limited by a primary emphasis on the cognitive functions of stories. Their role in shaping emotional experience in organisational setting is less well documented.

I assume this neglect is intimately related to views that organisations are rational entities, whilst emotions on the other hand often equate with 'irrationality', signs of weakness and 'not in control' behaviour. In this relation, Allbrow, 1992, cynically asked, "Do organisations have feelings?" He proposes that people re-read Weber. Traditionally many relate Weber with bureaucracy, in turn translated as being rational whereby emotions are not in favour. However, the author notes that Weber also gives equal weight to irrationality in his interpretative sociology). Yet, as noted by Nichol (1997:353) organisations are places that steam with emotions; excitement, anger, anxiety and fear, affection and hate, envy and jealousy..."

Stories and emotions indeed are not strange bedfellows. They intertwine with each other. On this point, Rosaldo (1993) notes that stories shape human conduct as they embody motives, feelings, aspirations, intentions and goals. Greco (1996:47) writes, "Narrative logic is concerned with capturing complex experiences that combine sense, reason, emotion, and imagination" Pragmatically, the view that stories are emotionally and symbolically charged narratives (Gabriel, 1997:136) is now being utilised by many in scientific circles, for example in understanding illness holistically (Mattingly, 1991; McKay and Ryan, 1995; Vangelisti, Crumley and Baker, 1999).

Here, I take Fineman's (1996:9-35) definition of emotion as my point of departure. According to this author, emotions are personal displays of affect, or "moved" and "agitated" states, such as joy, love, fear, anger, sadness, shame, embarrassment. In that definition, however, I see traces of the physiological theory of emotion. This theory postulates that emotions are feelings that accompany bodily changes as a response to an environmental stimulus. Another version of this definition sees emotions as associated with activity and functions where rules and conventions are observed, for example in performing social acts where one is expected to follow certain scripts. As such 'real' emotional displays are curtailed and hidden in response to certain cultural persuasion. A good example of "unmoved" displays, at least in the public gaze, could be seen in Bali (Geertz, 1973;). In certain organisations, 'distorted' emotional displays are highly valued especially in industries that place "emotional labour" as their assets (Fineman, 1997:18). A good example of this performance can be seen in the smiling worlds of Disneyland and flight attendants (Wouters, 1989; Hochschild, 1993).

In brief, emotions are not limited to an individual's sensation alone, but also emerge from processes whereby people give meanings to their social condition. Denzin (1984: 50) notes:

> Emotional terms carry a double referent: they reflect feelings felt by the self and they reference feelings the person ...directs towards others, including social objects ...this appears to be the case for the following emotional terms: being angry, resentful, sad, joyful, depressed, hostile, enraged, ashamed, proud, affectionate, friendly, embarrassed, rejected, guilty, shameful, in pain or in love.

Perhaps it is important to note at this stage what constitutes emotions, as embedded in over 400 stories 'heard' by Gabriel

(1997a:151). (In coming to this list, he used a special version of a computer database package, Cardbox Plus Version 4. The list is a as follows: amusement, disparagement, pride, disapproval, relief, anger, pity, reproach, sadness, satisfaction, affection, approval, frustration, nostalgia, derision, worry, bitterness, horror, admiration, disappointment, diversion, panic, irony, mockery, anxiety, fun, guilt, scornfulness and self-disparagement. According to Gabriel, the package failed to list certain important emotions, such as embarrassment, happiness and hate, although those emotions were numerous in those stories. To him, this failure illustrates the shortcomings of using quantitative techniques in analysing *en masse* what is highly subjective, delicate material).

Reflections

Malays for a long time have honoured verbal manifestations in their life. In their written literature, such verbality is clearly visible (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 1997). Such love for 'sounds' can be seen in Malay classical romances and in Malay conversations where words and sentences are often rhythmic.

Pertinent to this love for sounds, among others, is the notion of *halus*, an integral part of Malay culture. The *halus* way of speaking is indeed universally admired among Malays. It is seen as *patut* (right and proper) and *sesuai* (appropriate) behaviour. Malay in general places great emphasis upon 'proper conduct' or *ada bahasa* in their life. As such, norms of refined (*halus*) speech are accepted as the proper way.

On the contrary doing otherwise is considered as 'improper' or on the extreme as *kurang ajar* (uncouth). In elaboration Goddard (1998) writes,

> The linguistic features of *halus* speech include the use of elegant phrases instead of mundane vocabulary, careful attention to forms of personal reference (for example by avoiding direct address and self-reference), and recourse to the large inventory of traditional sayings (*peribahasa*) to allude to any potentially sensitive matters. (p. 346)

Thus, if one does not address the other properly, one may be labelled as rude, a person without *bahasa*, or 'not knowing *bahasa*' (tidak mengerti bahasa), an injurious remark in the opinion of Malays.

At this point, an insight from the ethnography of communication is useful. As shown by Asmah (1992), Malays must follow certain 'rules of speaking' when they want to express their desires, opinions, emotions or making stories. To Goddard and Wierzbicka (1997) such rules are known as "cultural scripts," and they are intimately linked with the concept of social emotion. In relation to the above, *malu* is considered by many as the fundamental social emotion concept in Malay interaction. In its literal meaning, *malu* is glossed as 'ashamed, shy or embarrassed.' These translations however do not convey the fact that Malay regards *malu* as social good, akin to a sense of propriety (Goddard, 1996:432). It is common to hear among native speakers that a person with no *malu* is construed as an animal. (Some commentators see *malu* as a negative behaviour. For me it is more related to behaviour appropriateness. As such being malu in learning is considered bad).

In addition, there are two other concepts related to *malu*, which are *maruah* (dignity, honour) and *harga diri* (self-esteem). In this light, Malays are expected to think 'appropriately' before they speak. It is not merely about saving face but to avoid bad perception by the speaker. Your mouth is your tiger, says a proverb. Most important of all, Malays who practise Islam believe words are do'a (prayers). Briefly, in this concept, every word is accountable in the eyes of God. However, if Hofstede's (1980) perspective is brought into this picture the Malay 'reserved' discourse style is closely intertwined with the idea of "power distance." Such an attitude is seen by some writers as growing out of conditions of being unfree and in sufferance. Yet, it is not right to assume the above 'restraint' results in conformity and passivity. As shown by Dailie (1990) Malays often do their *tikaman* (stabbing) implicitly. One of their main weapons is *bahasa*. Often they use *bunga bahasa* (figurative language), such as metaphors and *peribahasa* (proverbs) as their mode of presentation.

To summarise, in order to understand Malay stories, one must deviate from McCloskey's (1990) suggestion of how to understand things. According to this author, there are only two ways of understanding things, either by way of a metaphor or by way of a story. Indeed, when one engages with Malays one must combine both.

Last note

It is important to note that research on stories in organisations is still in its infancy. Thus there is no clear way of doing it eventhough some scholars do give suggestions on 'how to do it' (Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1998). There are many ways of perceiving stories. They can be discussed as elements of organisational culture, as manifestations of symptoms of unconscious processes, and as a vehicle for organisational communication and learning, which may reveal various interests and multiplicity of voices. A point to note is that every story is told and framed from a certain perspective. Thus, it provides a means of constructing a world. According to Bruner (1990:64), people frame events and sentences in larger structures. As to how a personal story may look, it is not an individual production alone. It derives from larger group, culture, ideology and history contexts. Thus, a story therefore could arise out of certain script, schema or story lines (Ulich, 1998; Gioia, 1986:49-74), which are already 'there' in the society. After all, the stories in organisations provide means for ordering. Polkinghorne (1988:18) notes,

> The ordering process operates by linking diverse happenings along a temporal dimension and by identifying the effect one event has on another, and it serves to cohere human actions and events that affect human life into a temporary gestalt.

Stories in organisations have been studied in terms of functions. So far, a comprehensive list has been compiled by Boyce (1996) and extended by Gabriel (1997a, 1998a, 1998b). Based on those lists, organisational stories are seen to provide the following functions: as tools for sense-making (Weick, 1995); as a map or guidelines to comprehend activities that go around them (Wilkins, 1983; Wilkins and Thompson, 1991); as survival mechanisms by providing lessons regarding appropriate strategies in the face of complexities (Kelly, 1985); as a vehicle to express organisational values (Brown, 1986); as managerial tools to influence, manipulate and control organisational members (Wilkins, 1983); as an ideological force that articulates a system of meaning which gives privileges to certain interests over others (Mumby, 1987); as repositories of organisational intelligence (Kreps, 1989); and as a medium of sharing culture (Kelly, 1985).

As seen above, organisational stories have moved beyond their traditional function from 'superficially' entertaining and amusing listeners to becoming an organising agent. In this regard, one must not be misled by stories woven by chaotic creativity where illogicalities and ambiguities, inconsistencies and, imprecision prevail. Indeed, in that instability lies the story's meaning. In other words, the truth of stories lies not in their 'accuracy' but in the 'acceptance of truth' by listeners or readers. Every organisational member then can be a story-teller, which in turn makes them meaning-makers; there are polyphony of voices and realities in an organisation where each voice is trying to 'overpower the other.' In other words, language games are rife in storytelling. As an activity of enactment it overlaps with the social construction of reality (Hatch, 1997:41). Such overlap is common if one follows the discussions of activity theory. Briefly, this theory posits that man functions not only in a certain relationship with nature but also to other people. In this regard, Conville (1997:373) notes that relationships only 'exist' in one of two places, that is in the minds or the behaviour enacted. In this light of the above, claims made by Heath (1994:61) offer new insight: "Stories supply organisational attitudes, beliefs and values, describe its practices and operations, and portray characters and action of its members".

In sum, story telling is a communicative event by which organisational reality is created, modified and revised by organisational actors. Indeed it is a work of making order out of disorder in action.

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